

## Paranoia

*The* Modern world is full of hoaxes, rumours and conspiracies. "UFO strikes again and steals 3 cows for the aliens' heretic rituals" claim South American farmers; or "World leaders are controlled by Illuminati," say people who were defeated in the elections; and most recently: "Mutated coronavirus is spreading across the globe; people are endangered by a global pandemic," warn us the creators of a famous PC game simulating a global pandemic. I usually try to evade any nonsense which people try to scare me with. But this time I could not resist. Our city was embraced by the deadliest virus – by paranoia. And alas, I got infected.

On that fateful day in the morning I bought a newspaper, and its title ushered in something dangerous: "Black Shadow strikes again! Our streets witnessed new crime, two victims are in hospital." The Black Shadow was a name which had been created by the media for a new criminal, who occasionally beat up defenceless women or young boys who were walking alone in the city centre. He could not have chosen a better time to do so – our city was covered in smog, the streets were dark both ~~in~~ day and night due to the omnipresent haze and when the sun set, one could not see farther than five steps ahead.

When I got to work, I put my walking staff <sup>in</sup> to the corner, threw the newspaper on my desk and looked outside. Grey clouds were covering the sky, teaming up with smog against the sunlight, which could deliver only a small mist of light to our town. *I wonder why the mayor has not proposed a traffic ban yet with so much – Cough! – smoke everywhere. It looks like an old grotesque outside; black coats, white hand gloves, black hats, white dresses... and, without any doubt, Black Shadow. Damn, I should not think about that maniac, that's exactly what he wants! I have to remain calm and when my shift ends, I will go straight home!*

However, my plans were not ~~supposed~~ to be fulfilled. My boss complained about the quality of work of my department; therefore, we all had to stay at work for two more hours than usual. When I walked out, it was already dark. Black cars honking, white lamps flickering, black shoes ~~clapping~~, white newspapers rustling... and Black Shadow waiting. *No, no, no Black Shadow, keep your cool, chap! Jesus, I am not a woman, not a young boy, I would be able to defend myself. Moreover, he always takes breaks between his assaults, usually a week or two, and the last case happened yesterday! I am completely safe, yes, and even if I met him, I would beat the soul out of that dirty mugger, yes, I would... Wait, where am I?*

I lost the track and wandered unconsciously into some dark street. I smelled garbage and rats, but I could not discover where I was. ~~I~~ <sup>had</sup> probably missed the bus stop and continued to the north, but I had had to take some turn, because I was no longer on the main street. My mouth became dry and my fingers started to shiver. I felt I was not alone. Paranoia was holding me tight... and the Black Shadow was waiting for me. *This is nonsense! Just turn back and return to the main street, it's going to be fine!*

At that moment, I heard it. Something was rustling near the garbage pile. "Who's there?" I shouted. The rustling stopped. But nothing else happened. My vision was heavily obscured, so I could not see

"were not to be" is sufficient... the structure implies sth not realized.  
does not work "track" better "I had lost my way and wandered..." also: past perfect / 2 sequential actions.

better: tapping

what was happening. *It must be the Black Shadow!* I held my walking staff tight and slowly began approaching my target. One, two, three steps... I prepared for a strike. It must be quick. My staff is heavy, one blow should be enough. Get ready! Fourth step, and... Bang!

My consciousness shattered to pieces. I lost.

I woke up in someone else's bed. "Darling, come here, he is awake!" said some old man in a black suit and disappeared in the door. Soon came an old lady in a white dress and her eyes were shining:

"My goodness, you are alright! I am so glad we do not have to take you to the hospital. I am so sorry, so sorry!" the old lady **lamented**.

"What... what happened?"

"I am just an old and foolish woman who got scared, I am so sorry! I was throwing out our garbage when I heard someone in the dark. I stood still and waited, but I heard how he – you – came slowly closer to me. I silently grabbed an old bottle, and when I saw you holding your walking staff tight, I... I thought you were the Black Shadow...!"

"No, just do not cry, please, it is alright."

"I am sorry; I just panicked and hit you with the bottle. I am so sorry my poor boy!"

The mystery was solved. I felt relieved, but at the same time very uneasy. Maybe there was no *true* Black Shadow. Maybe one random incident a long time ago gave life to the Paranoia, which was nurtured by the press and now it creates Black Shadows in our own heads out of, for example, old ladies in white dresses who just throw out their garbage...

*Damn, that is garbage! You really got your head hit hard, not gonna lie, pal!*

Jan Hanousek  
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Well-seasoned story!!

Good use of vocab, good  
language, tenses (see past perfect)  
idiomatic language!

Excellent Tone! Reminds me  
of Edgar Allan Poe!

Do you know him? American story writer: 19th century.  
Check him out